The Story of Eve Bernhardt

Eve Bernhardt in 1959

SAMUEL CLAESSON

Although her only significant film role was as Dorothy in the cult classic *The Wizard of Mars* (1965), Eve Bernhardt had a respectable career that included appearances in several wide-release films, primetime television series, and stage productions. This auburn-haired starlet never achieved the status of Marilyn Monroe, Rita Hayworth, or Elizabeth Taylor, but she was just as gorgeous and hardworking.

Evelyn Mae Bernard was born on December 7, 1930, in Dayton, Ohio, to Paul and Evelyn Bernard. When a catastrophic flood destroyed their neighborhood, her family left Ohio. After they settled in Los Angeles Eve caught the acting bug. In addition to studying at UCLA, she began modeling coats at JCPenney, finding success as a print model and presenter at high-profile events. She won several titles throughout her career such as Miss Van Nuys, Miss Los Angeles Fire Department, Miss Lasting Impression, Queen of Fire Service Day, and Miss Casa de Cadillac.

After being crowned Queen of Flowers, she was discovered by mogul Howard Hughes. Promptly signed at RKO, with a salary of $250 a week, she was cast in the films *The French Line* (1954) and *Son of Sinbad* (1955). Unable to live on her film income alone, she worked graveyard shifts at drive-in diners and bars, and was even a cigarette girl at Ciro's. It was so exhausting, she considered quitting the industry on three occasions. Her other films, cast mainly as eye candy, included *The Big Combo* (1955), *The Harder They Fall* (1956), and *Robin and the 7*

Hoods (1964).

A chance to do some legitimate acting came after being cast by William Jarvis, an acting coach who considered Eve to be his protégée, in the plays *The Derelict* and *Drunkards*. Although they were both flops, they gave her valuable exposure and experience.

An opportunity at stardom arose when filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille became interested in signing her to a contract. Unfortunately, he died in January 1959 before things were finalized. The following year, on October 15, 1960, she got her first credited role as stewardess Sue Harrington, who's found murdered in her apartment, in the episode "Flying High" of *Lock Up*. Other television appearances followed, including *Girl Talk*, *Beauty Parade*, *The All New Truth or Consequences*, *The Bob Hope Show*, *The Red Skelton Show*, and *The Al Jarvis Show*.

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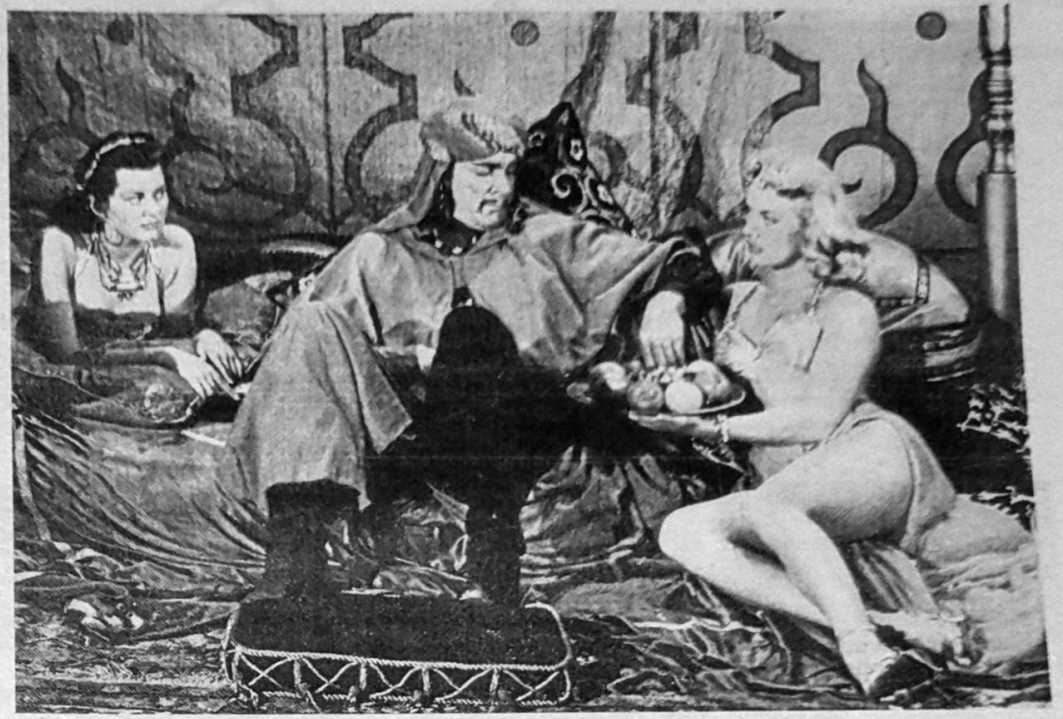

Eve Bernhardt (left) with Ian MacDonald and Joy Langstaff in Son of Sinbad (1955).

Her breakthrough happened after being cast as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Mars* (1965), a film loosely based on L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and Glinda of Oz. It made her a cult favorite among sci-fi fans, as it frequently aired on television for decades after its initial release. On a budget of $33,000, the filming took several weeks to complete. It was a difficult period for Eve. Although she loved working with John Carradine and Jerry Rannow, she clashed with co-star Roger Gentry, who allegedly made advances towards her. As a result, her romantic scene with him was removed from the script. After filming concluded, she suffered severe spinal issues due to the poorly-designed spacesuit she wore.

"Bernhardt is an extremely

Eve as Miss Fire Service.

Eve at the Naval Air Reserve.

The cover of Billy Tipton Trio's Sweet Georgia Brown (1957) featuring Eve.

Eve looking beautiful.

Eve in 1969

Eve and Roger Gentry suited up for The Wizard of Mars (1965).

Eve at the piano.

As Miss Van Nuys

beautiful woman, and refreshingly she's portrayed as just one of the crew rather than made part of a romantic subplot," wrote Meredith Taylor of Filmuforia.

"She kept to herself," said Jerry Rannow. "She was gorgeous, though. My jaw dropped when I found out she was 34 years old [when we made the movie]. I would've assumed she was in her 20s."

As the 1960s were ending, Eve was approaching her 40s, a death sentence for a starlet. Also, her biological clock was ticking, and if she didn't have a family soon, she'd miss the opportunity. It was with that in mind that she married Richard Harwood, a writer who was roughly a decade younger than she, on February 2, 1969. They had a daughter named Elizabeth. During their marriage, Eve sold door-to-door cosmetics, jewelry, and delved into painting.

On February 17, 2014, she passed away in Thousand Oaks, California, at the age of 83.

Why did Eve Bernhardt's career not blossom? It could've been her refusal to pose for pinups, or her unwillingness to disrobe on camera. It could've been her alternating uses of names like Eve Bernhardt, Evelyn Bernard, and Eve Bernard. She accomplished more than most actresses in Hollywood do, though, appearing in several films and in a starring role. Her daughter, Elizabeth Reynolds, a well-known location manager, is carrying the torch for her mother, working on television series like *American Horror Story*, *NCIS*, and *Euphoria*. She loves her mother and remembers her fondly. She's also writing her memoir, Boxed In, which is based on her childhood with the lovely Eve Bernhardt.